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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: GOJ WORKING TO SMOOTH TIES WITH IRAQ AS OPPOSITION
LAUDS IRAQI 'RESISTANCE'

REF: A. AMMAN 2851

[B](#). AMMAN 2909

[C](#). BAGHDAD 1507

[D](#). BAGHDAD 1220

[E](#). AMMAN 2714

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#). (C) King Abdullah has taken charge of the GOJ's effort to repair strained Jordanian-Iraqi relations. He has given his new cabinet (public) orders to cultivate better ties with Iraq, and underscored Jordan's commitment to Iraq's reconstruction and institution-building. His former Minister of Awqaf last week called on imams to preach non-violence in Iraq. The King also has congratulated the new Iraqi leadership, and may soon dispatch his prime minister to Baghdad. The visit would represent the first by an Arab PM since Saddam's overthrow. Meanwhile, opposition political parties have potentially stoked the fire yet again with a statement lauding the "noble Iraqi resistance." End Summary.

KING GIVES NEW CABINET MARCHING ORDERS ON IRAQ

[2](#). (U) King Abdullah has taken charge of the GOJ effort to improve damaged relations with the Iraqi Transitional Government in the aftermath of reports in March that a Jordanian carried out a massive suicide bombing in Hilla. Jordanian papers reported that the King on April 9 sent congratulatory cables to Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari, and President of the National Assembly Hajim Husni, expressing Jordan's support in rebuilding Iraq. During a meeting with the newly-formed cabinet of Prime Minister Badran on April 10, King Abdullah charged the ministers with doing their utmost to cultivate good relations with Iraq (ref A). Pledging to give Iraq whatever support it needs, he said: "The success of the Iraqis in rebuilding their state is a success for Jordan."

[3](#). (C) Jordan intends to back up its extensive practical support for Iraq's reconstruction and institution-building (ref B) with a near-term visit of PM Badran and his new foreign minister to Baghdad. A date has not yet been set, but the visit is all but confirmed, according to Jordanian officials, despite the ongoing closure of the Jordanian embassy there (ref C). Badran and FM Qasrawi will be the highest level Jordanian officials to visit Iraq since the toppling of Saddam Hussein, and the first PM and FM from a neighboring state. The proposed visit would come after numerous visits to Jordan of high-level Iraqi officials, most recently Iraqi Planning Minister Mahid al-Hafiz in late March (outgoing IIG PM Allawi was also here on a private visit, but had good exchanges with senior Jordanian leaders). Hafiz's talks with his Jordanian counterpart focused on preparations for the Iraq donors conference planned to be hosted by Jordan in June, according to local press reports. The ministers reviewed the work of a joint committee formed during a previous visit of Iraq's interim PM to Jordan that is supposed to coordinate activities in multiple sectors.

[4](#). (U) The GOJ also is encouraging its mosque preachers to toe the line on the issue of violence in the name of Islam. During a visit to a Zarqa area mosque, outgoing Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Ahmad Hilayel on April 3 called on religious leaders to denounce violence and the killing of innocents in neighboring countries in the name of Islam, particularly Iraq, and "resisting the calls of dissension and conflict." He emphasized the importance of helping to stabilize Iraq, and said Jordan's mission to help the needy around the world (including Iraq) reflects the "true and honorable picture" of Islam, a religion of moderation and understanding. In a veiled reference to those who had accused the GOJ of supporting terrorists in Iraq, Hilayel rejected attempts to "cast doubts on the stands of Jordan" as it works to "serve the Arab and Islamic nation." Rather, Jordan denounces "acts of rancor and violence" and seeks to preach a message of "love, cooperation, unity good deeds and

charity.... from our pulpits," he said.

OPPOSITION LAUDS THE "RESISTANCE"

15. (U) Meanwhile, the Opposition Parties Higher Coordination Committee (representing 14 political parties, though dominated by the Islamic Action Front) denounced the continuing "U.S. occupation" of Iraq and called on Iraqis to determine their future independently. In a statement issued on April 9 to mark the second anniversary of Saddam's overthrow, the Committee declared: "The purpose of the war on Iraq was and will remain to humiliate the Arab nation, protect Israel's security and profit from the region's wealth and natural resources to benefit the U.S." The parties called on Arab countries to acknowledge the Iraqi "resistance" as a legitimate force and to offer them official and public support and protection. It also called on all Iraqis to unite and chart a "national agenda" that would end U.S. occupation and "eliminate its plans to divide the country on sectarian and ethnic bases."

16. (U) In a separate statement, the Islamic Action Front blamed the U.S. for Iraq's current situation. "Iraq has become a huge prison for its people. Iraqis are being subjected to the most heinous of crimes known to mankind, starting from cold-blooded murder to physical and psychological torture... this represents the downfall of the U.S. civilization that has for long been trying to present itself as a role model." It called for an immediate withdrawal of "occupiers" from Iraq and demanded that Arab countries support those who are "fighting for the liberation" of the country.

TENSIONS DEEPER THAN MEETS THE EYE?

17. (C) In the aftermath of the Ra'ed al-Banna fiasco, Jordanians (including those in government) continue to complain that Jordan was unfairly accused of supporting terrorism. They point out that citizens from many other countries (including Syrians, Egyptians, and Palestinians, for example) are among the foreign fighters carrying out terrorist acts in Iraq. They are quick to blame the Syrian government in particular for supporting insurgents (in stark contrast to Jordan's staunch counter-terrorism stand) and complain bitterly that Iraqi critics have not been as vocal about those countries as they have been in targeting Jordan. They also continue to blame Iraqis (such as Ahmad Chalabi) with perceived personal grudges against Jordan for fanning the flames. Iraq's ambassador-designate to Egypt Safia Taleb al-Souhail (who has known SCIRI leader Hakim for 20 years) told emboff during a recent visit to Amman that Hakim's motive for targeting Jordan in the aftermath of the Hilla bomber story was to send a warning to King Abdullah against getting involved in domestic Iraqi politics. It also is part of a long-range plan to re-direct Iraqi economic ties from Jordan to Iran, she said. She criticized former PM Allawi for not immediately noting that Hakim's fiery public statements represented the views of a private person and did not reflect the views of the Iraqi government.

18. (C) When pressed, Jordanians grudgingly acknowledge that Jordan's ties with the former Iraqi regime, which ordinary Iraqis see as having benefited Jordanians at their expense, is partly to blame for Iraqi anger towards Jordan. Iraqi Minister for Women's Affairs, Narmin Othman, an ethnic Kurd, told emboff on the margins of a recent capacity-building conference held in Amman that many Iraqis question why more Iraqi training is not done in Iraq. They particularly resent hearing about Iraqi training and conferences in Jordan, especially big programs like the Jordanian police training center. She explained that these are perceived by some Iraqis as a U.S. "gift" or "pay-off" to Jordan rather than something directed at Iraqis. She claimed that Iraqis tend to equate the current situation of Jordan-based Iraqi training to the Jordanian profiteering during the Saddam era.

AND WHAT OF SCIRI'S GRIEVANCES AGAINST JORDAN?

19. (C) Jordanians also bristle in response to SCIRI's other "grievances" against Jordan (ref D). For example, in response to the charge that the GOJ is "coddling" members of Saddam's family and protecting members of Saddam's regime, officials here counter that the GOJ has admitted the family members into Jordan out of humanitarian motives only. They insist they are under close watch, only allowed to stay in Jordan on the condition that they do not engage in anti-IIG/ITG activity. They deny there are any prominent figures of the Saddam regime in Jordan. With regard to incitement in the media, Jordanian journalists themselves have begun to take an introspective look at their own

coverage of the so-called "noble Iraqi resistance" (ref E). Regarding the King's controversial warning of a rising "Shi'a crescent" in the region, we have heard many Jordanians endorse his fear, but several contacts have privately criticized the King's comment as "ignorant." Jordanians also flatly deny allegations of crooked business deals during Saddam's era that earned them ill-gotten profits. Finally, we have no information that a Jordanian was responsible for the assassination of Hakim's brother Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim. If a Jordanian citizen was, the Jordanians would inevitably (and legitimately) reply that the government is not responsible for the acts of every individual that carries a Jordanian passport (as with the case of Ra'ed al-Banna or any other Jordanian insurgent in Iraq, including Zargawi). In any event, Jordanian officials believe their record on counter-terrorism speaks for itself.

COMMENT

110. (C) Despite the GOJ's best efforts to support Iraq, the opposition will continue to be a painful thorn in its side on the Iraq issue. It will also be difficult to shake the historical grievances Iraqis hold towards Jordanians dating back to the GOJ's close relationship with the Saddam regime. Ordinary Jordanians' real fear of growing Shi'a power on its eastern doorstep and widespread antipathy towards U.S. policy in Iraq and the region is driving the opposition's almost blind support for the "noble resistance" (although there are isolated voices in the media beginning to challenge the press' "groupthink" sympathy for the insurgents). At the risk of drawing unwanted attention by harshly curtailing the local opposition on this issue, the GOJ has few options as it seeks to tamp down the rhetoric here and publicly deal with Iraqi skepticism about their intentions.

111. (U) Minimize considered.

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HALE